

*We wish a complete recovery to our dear friend Adam*



**The Splitting of the Red Sea:**  
**Exod. 14:17 and 18 state that G-d will gain honor through "Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen."**  
**Why repeat it? What is the lesson?**  
 (Write in with your answers)

ESTD 1997

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

# JewishTimes

Volume III, No. 16...Feb. 6, 2004

[WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES](http://WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES)

Download and Print Free

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

PARASHAS BESHALACH	1,6,7
PROVERBS	1,4,5
SPLITTING OF THE RED SEA	1,2,3
KILLING OF INFANTS	5
HEAVENS AND PRAYER	8

**SUGGESTED READING:**  
 SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

**Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES**

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:  
[www.mesora.org/13principles.html](http://www.mesora.org/13principles.html)

**God's Existence: Belief or Proof?**

[www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html](http://www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html)

**God's Land Without God?**

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:  
[www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html](http://www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html)

## Beshalach

**RABBI BERNARD FOX**

Hashem told Moshe that his prayers were not needed. This is a reflection on Moshe's unique nature. He participated in a perpetual relationship with Hashem. He did not need to seek some higher spiritual plane in order to participate

*(continued on page 6)*

## KING SOLOMON'S Proverbs



**MATT SCHNEEWEISS**

"Fear of Hashem is the finest of virtues;[1] wisdom and character refinement are scorned by fools" (Mishlei 1:7)

The Meiri[2] explains that the term "yirat Hashem" in this pasuk refers to the fulfillment of a precept out of fear or awe of the One who commanded it, not because it makes sense to one's mind. On the surface, the Meiri's interpretation of this pasuk seems to be problematic, for elsewhere[3] the Meiri writes that one should study the mitzvot with the goal of keeping them with "the ultimate [level of] keeping – as if they are mandated by the intellect." [4] In other words, a person is obligated to search for the rational reasons behind the mitzvot and know them to the extent that he

*(continued on page 4)*

# the SPLITTING OF the Red Sea



**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Parshas Bishalach commences with the Jews' journey immediately following their Egyptian exodus, (Exod. 13:17) "G-d did not guide them via the path of the land of the Phillistines, as it was near, lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt." As Maimonides teaches in his great work, The Guide for the Perplexed (Book III. Chap. 32), G-d's initial plan was not to lead the Jews towards the Red Sea, but towards the Phillistines. A separate consideration demanded this route be avoided. But I ask, why would

*(continued on next page)*

# the SPLITTING OF the Red Sea

(continued from previous page)

the Jews return to the very place they were now fleeing? Nonetheless, we are taught to prevent the Jews' return to Egypt, G-d circumvented their route.

We then read that G-d clearly orchestrated events to make the Jews appear as easy prey for Pharaoh, enticing him to recapture his fled slaves. G-d told Moses to encamp by the sea. What was the purpose? (Exod. 4:3) "And Pharaoh will say about the Children of Israel that they are confused in the land, the desert has closed around them." The purpose of traveling not by way of the Phillistines, but towards the Red Sea now appears to have a different objective; to lure Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea to be drowned. But it does not appear this was the plan from the outset. Had it been, G-d would not have taught of His consideration regarding the Phillistines. That nation's war would not have entered into the equation.

The ultimate purpose in the death of Pharaoh and his army is stated in Exodus 14:4, "And I will strengthen Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them, and I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am G-d..." G-d sought to gain honor by leading the Jews to the Red Sea, luring in Pharaoh, and creating the miraculous partition of waters. We are confused; did G-d lead the Jews to the Red Sea to circumvent the Phillistines, or to lure Egypt to their death and gain honor?

Upon their arrival at the Red Sea, the Jews soon see Pharaoh and his army in pursuit. Moses prays to G-d, and G-d responds, "Why do you cry unto me?" This is a surprising response. A basic principle in Judaism is the beseeching of G-d's help when in need, and the Jews most certainly were. So why does G-d seem to oppose such a principle at this specific juncture?

Another question apropos of this section is what the goal was of the Ten Plagues, in contrast to the parting of the Red Sea? If the Red Sea parting was merely to save the Jews and kill Pharaoh and his army, G-d could have easily spared this miracle and wiped out the Egyptians during one of the Ten Plagues. G-d prefers fewer miracles, this is why there is 'nature'. Our question suggests that the destruction of Pharaoh and his army has a different objective other than the simple destruction of the Egyptians. What is that objective?

There is also an interesting Rashi which states a metaphor taken from Medrash Tanchumah. Rashi cites that when the Jews "lifted their eyes and saw the Egyptian army traveling after them, they saw the officer of Egypt traveling from heaven to strengthen Egypt." (Exod. 14:10) What is the meaning of this metaphor?

Looking deeper into the actual miracle of the Red Sea splitting (Exodus 14:28-29) we read, "And the waters returned and they covered the chariots and the horsemen and the entire army of Pharaoh coming after him in the sea, and there was not left of them even one. And the Children of Israel traveled on dry land in the midst of the sea and the water was to them walls on their right and on their left." Ibn Ezra states that Pharaoh and his army were being drowned simultaneously with the Jews' crossing through on dry land. This is derived from the Torah first stating that Pharaoh was drowned, followed by a statement that the Jews traveled on dry land. Although one section of the sea turbulently tossed and submerged the Egyptian army, "...and G-d churned Egypt in the midst of the sea", the adjoining section contained waters parted into two calm walls on either side of the Jews, bearing a dry seabed. Ibn Ezra calls this a "wonder inside a wonder".

We must ask why G-d deemed it essential to combine salvation and destruction in one fell swoop. G-d could have exited the Jews completely, prior to allowing the Egyptians entrance into the sea. What is learned from G-d's planned simultaneity of Jewish salvation and Egyptian destruction?

Now we must ask an unavoidable and basic question which Moses himself pondered; why were the Jews subjected to Egyptian bondage? To recap, Moses once saved the life of a Jew, beaten by an Egyptian. Moses carefully investigated the scene, he saw no one present, and killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried him in the sand. The next day, Moses sought to settle an argument between the infamous, rebellious duo, Dathan and Aviram. They responded to Moses, "will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses feared the matter was known. But how was this matter made public? The Torah described the scene just before Moses killed the taskmaster (Exod. 2:12), "And he turned this way and that way, and there was no man (present)..." So if there was clearly no one present, who informed on Moses? A Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer; the Jew who Moses saved was there, he turned in Moses. We are astounded that one who's life was saved would inform on his savior. What causes such unappreciative behavior? The Torah's literal words describing Moses' astonishment are "(Moses said) therefore the matter is known", referring to the disclosure of Moses' murder of the Egyptian. Rashi quotes a medrash on the words "the matter was known", paraphrasing Moses' own thoughts,

(Rashi on Exod. 2:14) "The matter has been made known to me on which I used to ponder; 'What is the sin of the Jews from all the seventy nations that they should be subjugated to back-breaking labor? But now I see they are fit for this.'"

Moses now understood why the Jews were deserving of Egyptian bondage. This ungrateful Jew's backstabbing act answered Moses' question. But this ungrateful nature is not its own trait, but a result of another trait: The act of informing on Moses displays an inability to undermine Egyptian authority; "Even if my brother Jew saves me, Egypt is still the authority who I must respect". It wasn't aggression against Moses, but an unconditional allegiance to Egypt. The Jews' minds were emotionally crippled by their decades as slaves. The famous Patty Hearst case teaches us of the Stockholm Syndrome, where victims sympathize with their captors. Israel too sympathized with Egypt. Such an identification would cause one to inform on his own friend, even on his own savior Moses. Moses witnessed this corrupt character trait firsthand and realized that Israel justly received the Egyptian bondage as a response. But how does the punishment fit the crime? (You may ask that this is reverse reasoning, as this ungrateful nature came subsequent to bondage, not before. But I answer that Moses too knew this, yet Moses saw something in this ungrateful act which he knew predated Egyptian bondage, answering Moses' question why Israel deserved this punishment.) So what was Moses' understanding of the justice behind Israel's bondage? Seeing that the Jew informed on him even after saving his life, Moses said, "the matter is known", meaning, I understand why the Jews deserve bondage.

In approaching an answer, I feel our very first question highlights the central issue - the cause for the splitting of the Red Sea. The two reasons given for G-d redirecting the Jews' journey are not mutually exclusive. The latter, drowning of Pharaoh and gaining honor is in fact a response to the former, the Jew's security in Egypt fostered by their extended stay. I suggest the following answer: G-d did in fact wish to take the Jews directly to Sinai. This is His response to Moses' question as to the merit of the Jews' salvation - "they are to serve Me on this mountain". Meaning, their merit is their future Torah acceptance at Sinai and their subsequent adherence. But due to a peripheral concern of the Phillistines, a new route was required. And not just a route on the ground, but a route that also addressed the underlying inclination towards an Egyptian return. G-d initially wanted only to bring Israel to Sinai. But now He sought to address the Jews' draw towards Egypt. G-d wanted to drown Pharaoh and his army to respond to the Jews' current mentality. Their preference of Egyptian bondage over warring with the Phillistines to maintain freedom was unacceptable

(continued on next page)

# the SPLITTING OF the Red Sea

(continued from previous page)

to G-d. G-d enacted the miracle of the Splitting of the Red Sea, for many objectives, but primarily to remove the security Egypt afforded these former slaves. Destruction of the Egyptian empire was a necessary step in Israel's development.

This answers why G-d responded to Moses' prayer when the Egyptian army drew near, "Why do you cry unto Me?" In other words, G-d was telling Moses that prayer is inappropriate right now. Why? Because the very act of traveling to the Red Sea was in fact the solution for what Moses prayed - the destruction of Egypt. G-d was informing Moses that what you pray for is already in the works, and therefore your prayer is unnecessary.

Egypt's destruction was not an ends in itself. It had a greater goal - to replace Egypt's authoritative role with the True Authority - G-d. This dual 'motive' is displayed in a specific formulation of the Red Sea miracle. Moses tells the Jews "as you see Egypt today, you will never again see them. G-d will war for you, and you will be silent." There are two ideas here. The first is the termination of the Egyptians. They had to be rid of the Egyptian 'crutch'. Seeing them dead on the seashore emancipated them mentally. There were no more Egyptian taskmasters to direct their lives. The phenomena of a slave can be created by nature, or nurture. In Egypt, the Jews were nurtured into a slave mentality, a dependency on a dominating authority. This mind set actually affords some psychological comfort, despite physical pain. When one prefers slavery, he in other words prefers not to make decisions, and relies heavily on a leader. Perhaps for this reason, the very first laws given (in Parshas Mishpatim) address slavery. They outline this institution as a simple, monetary reality. One has no money, so he pays his debt via servitude. But in no way is human respect compromised when he is a slave. The master must give his slave his only pillow and suffer a loss of comfort himself. The slave remains equal to the master in all areas and deserves respect as any other man. Slavery is simply an institution under the heading of monetary laws. This teaches the Jews that the slavery they experienced is not a way of life, but a temporarily state. The fact that G-d does not prefer slavery for man is His statement that "you are servants to me and not to man." One is even physically reminded of the corruption which exists in the desire to be a slave, by the

Torah law of boring his ear. The ear which heard on Sinai, "servants to Me are you, and not servants to servants (man)". (Rashi on Exod. 21:6)

The second idea derived from "G-d will war for you, and you will be silent", is that salvation is delivered solely by G-d. Your "silence" means G-d alone will bring salvation. There cannot be another cause sharing G-d's role as the "go-ale Yisrael" - the Redeemer of the Jews is G-d alone. Why is this necessary? This underlines the primary concept of the miracle of the sea. The goal was to instill in the Children of Israel an appreciation for G-d, and an acceptance of His authority. This authority would remain compromised, had Egypt survived. Respecting G-d's exclusive authority is also a prerequisite for the Jews' impending acceptance of the Torah on Sinai. For this reason, many of G-d's commands are "remembrances of the Exodus" for the goal of engendering appreciation for the Creator's kindness. When man's relationship with G-d is based on appreciation for Him - as guided by the commands - man is thereby reminded that G-d desires the good for him. As man acts to fulfill his Torah obligations, he will not view them as inexplicable burdens, but he will seek to understand G-d's intended perfection in each command. Man will then arrive at his true purpose, and find the most fulfillment in his life. Man will be guided in all areas by Divine, rational and pleasing laws which conform perfectly to man's mind. All conflicts will be removed.

The males and females of the Children of Israel verbalized identical, prophetic responses to G-d's triumph, "G-d is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea". G-d's objective of not only eliminating Egypt's, status in the Jews' mind, but gaining honor for Himself was achieved. This identical song of praise (Az Yashir) of both the male and female Jews displayed the newly instilled appreciation for their victorious G-d. The destruction of the Egyptians and the acceptance of G-d were the two primary issues that were addressed successfully. This explains why the Jewish salvation and the Egyptian destruction happened simultaneously. They formed one ultimate goal. Had G-d desired simple destruction of the Egyptians as its own ends, He could have done so in Egypt. But it was only in response to the Jew's warped overestimation of Egypt, that G-d destroyed them in the Red Sea, together with the Jewish salvation. The deaths of the Egyptians was a means for the acceptance of G-d, unobscured by any other master. Subsequent to the parting of the sea, the Jews in fact attested to G-d's success in His plan, as it is said, "and they believed in G-d and in Moses His servant."

How do we explain the medrash regarding the "officer of Egypt? It now fits precisely with our theory: The Jews felt unconditionally bound to Egypt as inferiors. At the shores, they didn't actually see any "officer of Egypt traveling from

heaven." This metaphor means they looked at Egypt as invincible, as if some heavenly force defended Egypt over which they could not prevail. This is the meaning of the medrash. It is a metaphor for Israel's vanquished state of mind.

In summary, the plagues of Egypt served to spread fame of G-d, "And you will speak of My name throughout the land." The splitting of the Red Sea had a different purpose, "And I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army." I am suggesting the honor G-d acquires is also for the good of Israel, not just Egypt. The Jews will view G-d as One Who is incomparable. The Red Sea miracle was executed as a response to the crippled mentality of the Jews, as G-d's stated, "...lest they repent when they see war and return to Egypt." The circumvention from Phillistine to the Red Sea was to avoid an inevitable return to Egypt, and to also correct that very impulse by the Jews witnessing G-d's triumph over Egypt, simultaneously instilling tremendous appreciation for G-d. In one act, the corruption in Israel was removed and a new faith in G-d was born, "and they believed in G-d and in Moses His servant." This simultaneous termination of Egypt and salvation for themselves was reiterated twice in the Az Yashir song, "G-d is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea". This response displayed how effected the Jews were by G-d's miraculous wonders and salvation.

In all honesty, the Jews do revert to "fond" recollections of Egypt not too long after these events, and in the Book of Numbers. However, we cannot judge any acts of G-d's as failures, if His subjects subsequently err. G-d's method - and perfection - is to offer man the best solution at a given time. This is a tremendous kindness of G-d. Man has free will and can revert back to his primitive state even after G-d steps in to assist him. This human reversion in no way diminishes from G-d's perfect actions. Our appreciation of His wisdom and His precision in His divine actions remains firm. All of G-d's actions displaying His perfection and honor are not for Him, as He does not need a mortal's praises. He does it for us, so we may learn new truths and perfect ourselves in our one chance here on Earth.

One question remains: What is Moses' understanding of, and agreement with G-d's plan to enslave Israel due to their corruption, as displayed by Moses' informant? How does bondage fit the crime, and what exactly was the crime of the Jews, that they deserved bondage? ■



(continued from page 1)



# KING SOLOMON'S Proverbs

MATT SCHNEEWEISS

will be compelled to fulfill them by virtue of their inherent rationale.[5] This appears to be a contradiction – if the goal of man is to fulfill the mitzvot because they make sense to him, then how can yirat Hashem be considered the finest of virtues? And if yirat Hashem is the finest of virtues then why should one even attempt to understand the reasons behind the mitzvot? Understanding rationale behind the mitzvot seems to only detract from yirat Hashem! In order to understand the Meiri's interpretation we must first look at the rest of his commentary on this pasuk:2

Our Sages have already said,[6] "Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his chochma, his chochma will endure," meaning to say that yirah is to chochma like a foundation to a building.[7] It is known that if the foundation of a building is weak then the slightest disturbance can cause the destruction of the whole building. So too with [the comparison of] yirah to chochma – if one's yirah is weak, the slightest doubt will thrust a person into confusion and will destroy the inner foundations of his emunah in his heart. [All of this will happen] if his "building" lacks a strong foundation.

At first glance the Meiri's analogy seems to make a lot of sense . . . that is, until one attempts to define the term "yirat Hashem" and describe its relationship to chochma. The Meiri's previous definition of "yirat Hashem" – unquestioning obedience out of awe – doesn't make sense here, for how does weakness of will detract from emunah? Ostensibly, a person can

have strong emunah and still have weak will. Furthermore, if one is deficient in his ability to obey God's commandments, in what manner does that negatively affect his chochma? Loyalty in action and chochma seem to be two totally separate virtues. Isn't it possible that a person might be strong in one area and weak in the other?

In order to understand the Meiri's analogy of yirah and chochma to a foundation and building, we must utilize the definition of "yirat Hashem" as expressed by the Rambam:[8]

"When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His chochma which is infinite and without comparison . . . immediately he will recoil in awe and realize that he is a tiny, lowly, and dark creature, standing with a puny and limited mind before perfect knowledge, as David stated,[9] "When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers . . . [I wonder] what is man that you should recognize Him?"

The Rambam explains that yirat Hashem is the result of the appreciation of God's universe. When beholding God's creations, a person is overcome with awe at the absolute perfection of His handiwork. He realizes that everything in existence, from the largest nebula to the smallest particle, is designed with divine chochma, and every element of creation functions in absolute harmony with the system as a whole. The appreciation of such perfection fills a person with awe for the Supreme Designer. A rabbi

once explained, in accordance with the Rambam's definition, that true yirat Hashem can be compared to a physicist's appreciation of physics. The physicist spends his entire life studying the intricacies of physics and truly appreciates the chochma therein. Yet, when confronted with an anomaly or abnormality, he does not abandon his belief in the system of physics. To the contrary, his appreciation of the perfection of physics gives him the assurance that although he does not understand this particular phenomenon, he is confident that there is a rational cause behind it, and his faith in the system of physics will remain unharmed.

Now we can understand the Meiri's analogy. Just as the physicist will not abandon his belief in the validity of physics when confronted by a phenomenon he does not understand, so too, one who is confronted with information which seems to contradict his understanding of the Torah will not abandon his conviction in its veracity. A person who truly recognizes the perfection of God's Torah, when confronted with a contradiction, will realize that the contradiction is only apparent. His knowledge that there exists a rational explanation for everything in the Torah will keep him on the proper path, and his faith in the Torah will remain unharmed. If, however, he is confronted with an apparent contradiction and his yirat Hashem – his appreciation of the chochma and internal consistency of the Torah – is weak, he will be thrust into confusion, believing that this apparent contradiction is a disproof of the entire system. This confusion will lead him to abandon Torah.

With this knowledge we can now answer the apparent contradiction in the Meiri mentioned above. There is no conflict between the "finest virtue" of yirat Hashem (fulfillment of the mitzvot out awe, not intellect) and the injunction to fulfill the mitzvot out of a rational understanding. One must be able to do both. He must strive to understand the mitzvot, but when

confronted by a mitzvah (or any matter in halacha) that he does not understand, he must remain steadfast in his loyalty to Hashem and fulfill the precept out of yirat Hashem – awe of the Creator of the Universe and His perfect systems. Yirat Hashem is the prime virtue because without it, man, whose intellect is limited and futile, would simply be unable to uphold the impossible task of keeping all of God's Torah out of a rational understanding. Indeed, yirat Hashem is as essential to chochma as a foundation is to a building, and without a strong foundation, the building will collapse.

We can also answer the second apparent contradiction, namely, that understanding the reasons behind the mitzvot seems to detract from yirat Hashem. We see from the Rambam's definition that the strength of one's yirat Hashem will directly correspond to his intellectual level.[10] The more one studies God's universe, the greater his yirat Hashem will be. So too, the greater understanding one has of the reasons behind the mitzvot the greater his yirat Hashem will be. Hence, the truth is quite contrary to what we initially assumed – understanding the reasons behind the mitzvot does not detract from yirat Hashem, it enhances it.[11] This fundamental truth could not have been stated any clearer than in the statement of Elazar ben Azaryah, "without chochma, there is no yirah, and without yirah, there is no chochma." [12] □

[1] This reading follows the Meiri (Commentary on Sefer Mishlei 1:7), who interprets the word "reisheet" in accordance with the statement of Yerushalmi Masechet Terumot 4:3-4, "The Rabbis interpreted the word 'reisheet' to mean 'the most excellent of.'" See Devarim 18:4, Bamidbar 15:20, and Shemot 23:19 and 34:26 for examples. Most of the commentators, however, interpret "reisheet" in the sense of "first" or "primary," and the word "da'at" as

(continued from previous page)



# KING SOLOMON'S Proverbs

MATT SCHNEEWEISS

“knowledge,” rather than “virtues.”

[2] Rabbeinu Menachem ben Shelomo haMeiri Commentary on Sefer Mishlei 1:7.

[3] Rabbeinu Menachem ben Shelomo haMeiri Commentary on Sefer Tehillim 119:8. The pasuk reads, “I will keep Your statutes; do not forsake me utterly”

[4] The Meiri iterates this idea many other times in his Commentary on Sefer Tehillim and in his other works.

[5] This concept is fundamental. See the Sefer haChinuch #545 where he elaborates at length on the idea that the mitzvot have rational reasons behind them, supporting his view with the words of the Talmud, as well as the statements of the Rambam and Ramban. He ends the discussion with the following remark: “For here you see with your eyes . . . that there is a reason for the precepts of the Torah, to benefit human beings in their character traits, to temper their disposition, and accustom them to act correctly in all of their actions, [and to make known] that the performance of the mitzvot is for those who perform them, not (God forbid) for [the benefit of] the Creator, blessed is He.” See also the Rambam’s Guide to the Perplexed III:25-28

[6] Masechet Avot 3:9

[7] A similar analogy can be found in the Mivchar haPenimim 1:9 (attributed to either Rabbeinu Yedaiah haPenimi or to Rabbeinu Shlomo Ibn Gavriol), “a body without chochma is like a house without a foundation.”

[8] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishna Torah, Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 2:2

[9] Sefer Tehillim 8:4-5

[10] See the Mishna Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:6, regarding ahavat Hashem, in which the Rambam states, “A person does not love God

except for with the knowledge with which he knows him. According to the knowledge will be the love; if [the knowledge is] little, so will [the love] be little, and if [the knowledge is] a lot, so will [the love] be a lot.” The same is true for yirat Hashem, as can be inferred from Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 2:2.

[11] The Meiri’s analogy also serves to refute the claim that understanding the rationale of Torah detracts from emunah and yirat Hashem. Such a notion is as absurd as the notion that the larger a building is, the smaller its foundation will be. To the contrary, the size of the foundation is in direct correlation with the size of the building. The same is true with chochma and yirah. Striving to understand the Torah will not cause one to lose faith in the Torah, but will only strengthen his conviction. As the Rashba writes (in his T’shuvah b’Inyan Emunat haYichud), “one who increases inquiry increases his triumph over those who claim the opposite [of the truth].”

[12] Masechet Avot 3:21. See the Meiri’s commentary there for an elaboration on this concept.

## G-d's Justice: The Killing of Infants

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** I have always had a problem with the 10th Plague. How can anyone reconcile this punishment with "Tsedek, Tsedek, Tirdof", "strict justice shall you pursue"? After all, among the thousands upon thousands of firstborns who died, there must have been countless babies, infants, children and many others, totally innocent people who committed no sin.

So, where is the ultimate Justice in this collective death sentence?

**Mesora:** In such a delicate area, one must be careful not to allow his tender mercies for children to cloud an objective analysis. Be mindful as well, we are not discussing torturing children, but death alone.

Your question is predicated on an assumption that G-d's owes a long lifespan to each member of mankind. Of course, G-d cannot "owe", as there is nothing above His laws obligating Him, in anything. The concept of G-d "owing" is impossible. His will determines who will live, and for how long. As He decides that man may be short or tall, He also possesses full rights over who shall live, and for what duration. In His plan, only He knows how ultimate justice is served. How can we know His thoughts?

This answer alone suffices, but I wish to mention a few other thoughts.

In terms of man "deserving" justice, this applies to only those above age thirteen, when they have reached the state where they act with their minds, and are considered responsible for their actions, and are only now "meritorious" or "guilty". In this case, G-d cannot harm one who is guiltless, "Ish bicheto yamus", "a man in his own sin shall be killed". This means that man is punished for what he does, but only once he is an "ish", a man. That is, above thirteen years of age. (Maimonides, Laws of Repentance, 6:1) Below thirteen, Maimonides teaches that such a child is considered as man's property, and may be taken from his parent(s) as a punishment. This child has not reached an age where he is responsible, so he is not meritorious, nor is he guilty. His death is not a punishment to him, but to his parents.

But be clear, Egypt was not the first time G-d annihilated a people. During the Flood and Sodom, G-d also wiped out entire civilizations. In order to arrive at a true understanding of G-d's justice in this area, all cases must be studied. This is the reason G-d recorded

them all in His Torah.

Many factors may contribute to G-d's decision of wiping out a civilization, society or culture, including infants. For example, a society may be so corrupt, that no possible remedy exists, and all who enter it, or are raised therein, will become irrevocably corrupt. Their removal prevents other people from becoming corrupt as they are.

If there is no hope for the infants of Sodom, of Noah's generation, and of Egypt, there continued existence is futile for themselves, and destructive for others. For this reason, G-d commands in His Torah that we obliterate all members of the Amalek nation.

"Unquestionable mercy for children". This is the core of the problem. Man feels what he senses as unquestionable, is unquestionable. But this cannot be. G-d alone possesses absolute truth, and what He says, must be truth, in contrast to what we feel with our limited intelligence. Our's is to learn of G-d's knowledge, as He created all we see, and all that is just. He also created "justice"! It is foolish for man to complain that G-d must follow us! He created the entire universe. Let us be patient, and search out His great wisdom, instead of committing ourselves to ignorance, and abandoned, intelligent growth.

G-d created our ability to think - the tools with which to understand, far greater than what we initially possess when confronted with emotionally, wrenching issues. King Solomon said it so well, "...for what is man that he comes after the King, that all is already completed?" (Ecclesiastes, 2:12) "Do not be excited on your mouth, and (on) your heart do not hurry to bring forth a matter before G-d, because G-d is in heaven, and you are on Earth, therefore let your words be few." (Proverbs, 5:1)

Earnest study of the Torah's cases of G-d's annihilation will bring forth an even greater appreciation for His system of justice. ■

# Parashas Beshalach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from page 1)

in this miracle.[1] **"And Moshe extended his hand over the sea. And Hashem drove back the waters with a powerful east wind the entire night. And it made the seabed into dry land. And the waters were divided."** (Shemot 14:27)

Bnai Yisrael flee from Egypt. The people arrive at the shores of the Reed Sea. The sea stands before the nation. The Egyptians are directly behind them. Bnai Yisrael is trapped. The Creator performs one of His greatest miracles. He splits the Reed Sea. Bnai Yisrael enter the sea. They travel across the sea over its dry seabed. The Egyptians enter the sea in pursuit of their escaped slaves. The sea closes upon the Egyptians and they are drowned.

The Torah provides some interesting details regarding this miracle. Generally, we imagine that Moshe extended his hand over the water and suddenly the waters separated and dry land was revealed. Our passage provides a somewhat different description of these events.

According to our pasuk, the sea did not immediately split in response to Moshe's command. Moshe extended his hand over the water and a mighty wind arose. The wind blew the entire night. What was the function of this wind? Why did Hashem require this wind? Why did He not immediately split the waters.

We must begin our discussion of these questions with the comments of Nachmanides. He explains that the wind was part of an elaborate deception. The Almighty had brought the Egyptians to the Reed Sea. Here, they were to be destroyed. However, what was to induce the Egyptians to enter the sea? After all, if the Almighty had split the sea in order to save Bnai Yisrael, it was not likely He would allow the Egyptians to follow them. What would the point be of a miracle that failed to save Bnai Yisrael? Certainly, the Egyptians would realize that Hashem would not prolong His miracle for their benefit!

Nachmanides explains that the wind was part of a ruse. The Egyptians believed that the wind had split the sea. Bnai Yisrael were escaping into the sea as the result of remarkable good fortune. They just happened to reach the sea at the onset of a tremendous storm. The storm cleaved open the waters. The Egyptians felt that they too could take advantage of this opportunity. The wind would continue to drive the waters apart. They could enter the sea and overtake Bnai Yisrael. The



deception worked. The Egyptians were lured into the trap!

Of course, the Egyptians were mistaken in their interpretations of the phenomenon. They were not witnessing an unusual meteorological occurrence. They were seeing a miracle. They entered the sea and the Almighty brought the waters crashing down upon them.[2]

Rashbam adopts a completely opposite approach to explaining this wind. He contends that the wind actually split the water. The Creator performed this miracle through the vehicle of natural forces. Rashbam adds some detail. He explains that the wind had two functions. First, it caused the water to back up. Once the water backed up, the seafloor was revealed. Second, it dried the seafloor and created a passable path across the seabed.[3] Ibn Ezra adds that the wind continued to blow as Bnai Yisrael crossed the sea. Only the power of the wind prevented the water from rushing in on Bnai Yisrael.[4]

In short, we are faced with two approaches for explaining this wind. Nachmanides maintains that the wind was not a factor in splitting the sea. The wind was merely part of a ruse designed to lure the

Egyptians into the sea. Rashbam and others disagree. They insist that the miracle of the sea splitting was brought about through this wind. The wind split the sea, dried the seabed, and held the waters apart for Bnai Yisrael.

This raises an interesting question. We can understand the position of Nachmanides. The Almighty is the Creator of the universe. He formed the seas and established the boundaries between the oceans and the continents. Obviously, He can alter these boundaries. If He wishes to create dry land in the midst of the sea, He can. He is omnipotent. He does not need any wind to assist Him.

The position of Rashbam is more difficult to understand. It seems as if the Rashbam is limiting the Almighty. He seems to deny his omnipotence. Why does the Hashem need a wind to do His bidding?

The answer to this question is very important. It provides an insight into the Torah's understanding of the natural world. The answer also indicates the Torah's attitude toward scientific knowledge.

We all realize that we are required to observe the Torah. Observant Jews might dicker over the

(continued on next page)

# Parashas Beshalach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from previous page)

specifics of observance. However, we would agree that the Almighty revealed the Torah with the intention that we observe its commandments. The reason for observance is obvious. The commandments are an expression of the will of Hashem. As His servants, we must submit to His will.

However, it must be noted that the mitzvot of the Torah are not the only laws that Hashem created. In addition to the mitzvot, He created the laws of nature. These are the laws that govern the movement of the galaxies and the behavior of the smallest subatomic particle. Just as the Torah's mitzvot are an expression of His will, so too the laws of nature are a manifestation of the Divine. It is reasonable for the Creator to expect that these natural laws should be observed.

Now, we can understand Rashbam's position. Rashbam does not deny the Almighty's omnipotence. He is not positing that the Creator needs a wind to split the sea. He is asserting that a perfect Creator would not disregard His own laws. He would not capriciously suspend or violate the laws He had established.

The Rashbam is also providing us with an important perspective on scientific knowledge. In order to understand this perspective, let us ask a question. What is religion's attitude towards science? The answer is that science and religion have often contended with one another. Many religions have resisted science. What is the reason for this conflict?

There are many factors that have contributed to this contentious relationship. We will consider two of these. First, religion is often steeped in the mystical. For some, religion provides an explanation for the inexplicable. Religion begins where science ends. In other words, religion provides answers to the questions science cannot. In such a relationship, the advancement of science must reduce the significance of religion. As science expands our knowledge of the universe, the realm of religion is reduced. Mysteries that were once explained through some mystical truth are interpreted by a set of scientific principles. The realm of the mystical is reduced, and the danger arises that religion will become trivial.

There is a second issue. In some religions, doctrine may seem to contradict science. Religious doctrine is regarded as a revealed or, at least, inspired truth. It is not subject to challenge.

Therefore, any conflict with science must be eliminated.

When these conflicts arise, these religions must respond. There are a number of responses. At the extreme, these perceived threats could lead to outright suppression of science. More commonly, these challenges lead to the disparagement of science and a marginalizing of its importance.

It is noteworthy that many of our greatest Torah Sages possessed extensive knowledge of science. Apparently, these Sages did not perceive any conflict between their religious outlook and scientific knowledge. The attitude of these Sages suggests that science and Torah can peacefully coexist. What is the basis for this coexistence?

Rashbam's explanation of our pasuk provides a response. It is clear that Rashbam regarded the laws of the universe as a manifestation the Creator's will. They are an expression of His infinite wisdom. Even the Almighty will not flippantly disregard these laws. This implies that these laws deserve our respect.

This attitude eliminates the conflict between science and religion. The discoveries of science are not viewed as a threat to religion. On the contrary, these insights are an inspiration to the Torah scholar. They provide awesome testimony to the infinite wisdom of the Creator. The expansion of scientific knowledge does not diminish the significance of the Torah. This newfound knowledge gives us a greater appreciation of the Almighty. These insights are a source of inspiration in our service to Hashem through the performance of His mitzvot.

It is important to note that we are not suggesting that the study of science is as important as the study of Torah. This is a completely different issue. Even within a single science, there is a proper order for its study. For example, in mathematics the study of algebra precedes that of calculus. In addition, some sciences are more easily understood and more suitable for general study. And of course, practical considerations can suggest that one science be given priority over another. All of these issues and others must be discussed in order to determine the relative merit of Torah study as compared to the study of science. Nonetheless, it is clear from the comments of Rashbam that scientific knowledge deserves our respect.

**“Through the window she looks forth and cries. The mother of Sisera peers through the lattice. “Why is his chariot delayed in coming? Why are the wheels of his chariot late?”**

(Shoftim 5:28 - Haftarat Beshalach)

Devorah the prophetess describes the pain of Sisera's mother. She awaits the return of her son from battle with Bnai Yisrael. He is late. She senses he will not come home. Her ministers comfort her. They assure her that Sisera has defeated the Jews. He is delayed collecting spoils. But Sisera will never return. The army of Bnai Yisrael, inspired by Devorah, has defeated Sisera. Yael has killed him.

Why does Devorah describe the anguish of the mother of Sisera? Should we feel pity for the mother of this wicked man? Does Sisera's mother deserve our sympathy?

Sisera's army was not merely defeated. These enemies of Bnai Yisrael were devastated. Sisera's mother and her nation awaited the outcome of the battle. But no news came. There were no refugees from the war. No one escaped to bring news of the outcome.

The tears of Sisera's mother represent the totality of the defeat of Bnai Yisrael's enemies. Devorah, for this reason, included this image in her praise to Hashem. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 103.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 14:21.

[3] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Shemot 14:21.

[4] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 14:21.



# The Heavens and Prayer

DAVID FISCHBEIN

In the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim (90:4), the Mechaber (author), R' Yosef Karo, rules that openings or windows must be built into a house of prayer in the direction of Yerushalayim so that one will pray in front of them. The Mishnah Berurah (90:8) asks what the purpose of this law is, considering the Mechaber ruled (95:2) that one must point his eyes downward when praying. He answers that the purpose is for one who loses his concentration in the middle of his prayer. To regain his concentration, he should look through the window toward the heavens.

How does looking toward the heavens help one regain his concentration? The simple answer is that one will be reminded of the One before whom he is standing when he looks at the heavens. However, we are well aware that G-d does not literally dwell in the heavens, or in any place for that matter. "...behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You..." (I Kings 8:27). We are forced, then, to say that looking to the heavens will remind us of ideas about G-d that we already know, and this will help us concentrate. I.e., certain aspects of the sky, from man's perspective, can be used to represent ideas about G-d.

One should be cautious, however, in making such abstractions. One is expected to already know all of the fundamental ideas about G-d (He is one, He has no body, He is outside of time, etc.) before he observes the heavens from this perspective. If a person uses the Mishnah Berurah's advice before becoming familiar with these ideas, he will likely be led astray by his imagination. In short, the advice is only intended to be used as a reminder for ideas that one already knows.

Try to think a little bit about the sky,

and about the aspects of it that can be used for our purpose, before moving on.

The first thing one notices about the sky is that it is above him. One must always know that there is a G-d "above" him, who is infinitely greater than him. When man ponders this, he is humbled, and is better prepared to pray.

Next, one notices that the sky is gaseous. In reality, no state of matter is any less physical than the other. However, one usually associates the physical realm with solid objects, since they are the most dense, or "concrete." From this perspective, the sky can be said to be the least physical object that we can see. When we are directed to the sky, then, we are focusing our minds further away from the physical. Similarly, in prayer, we must clear our minds of our daily physical activities. This aspect of the sky will also remind us of G-d's incorporeality.

One also notices that the sky appears to have no bounds. There is no point of elevation that we can claim is the beginning or end of the sky. Furthermore, although one is in awe when he sees the sky from one end of the horizon to the other, he is well aware that what he sees is but a tiny portion of an entity that encapsulates the entire globe. In a similar manner, man should realize that he can have no direct knowledge of G-d, and that whatever knowledge we do have about His works is but a drop in the sea. The lack of boundaries will also remind us that G-d is not bounded by any system.

From the simple perspective of a man standing on earth, one will see that his physical sustenance ultimately comes from the heavens. Through the medium of the sky, the sun shines forth its light and provides heat to all life on our planet. It is from the sky that we receive rain,

which allows our crops to grow, among other things. We also notice that despite the fact that the sky appears to connect to the ground at the horizon, it in fact never changes its distance between itself and the ground. I believe these two aspects represent the main knowledge that we are supposed to gain from praying.

In the first two blessings of the Amidah, we affirm that G-d relates to man and the physical world. G-d constantly extends the Hashgachah, or Divine Providence to man. (Although Bnei Yisrael had been chosen as the nation that can relate to the highest level of Hashgachah, it is their job to teach the rest of the people of the world how to channel their energies to G-d so that the Hashgachah will extend to them as well.) Also, G-d constantly demonstrates his total control over the affairs of the world, both in nature and in miracles. In our analysis, this is represented by man's dependence on the sustenance he receives from the sky. Immediately afterwards, in the third blessing, we affirm that G-d is completely separate from this world. I.e., G-d is not attached to this world, He has no need for its existence, and we can't use any parts of the system of nature to trace back to direct knowledge of G-d. This is represented by the illusion of the sky touching the earth. Although G-d relates to us in the smallest details of life, He in fact does not change in any way because of it.

The Almighty has thus provided us with a tool for constantly remembering Him. When a person observes the Heavens, he is reminded of fundamental ideas about G-d and how He relates to us. When he contemplates these ideas, he is reinvigorated to concentrate on being "omed lifnei Hashem" (standing before G-d). ■